

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, SF, RH

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF DEFENSE BOTHA SPECULATES ON
USE OF SOUTH AFRICAN TROOPS IN RHODESIA

1. RESPONDING TO QUESTION ABOUT LEVEL OF TRAINING FOR
BORDER DEFENSE FORCES AT ELECTION MEETING IN GLENCOE, NATAL,
MARCH 12, MINDEFENSE P. W. BOTHA APPEARED TO OPEN POSSIBILITY
OF SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN RHODESIA TO SUPPLEMENT
OR REPLACE SA POLICE ALREADY STATIONED THERE.

2. MARCH 13 JOHANNESBURG STAR, IN REPORTING BOTHA'S REMARKS,
INTERPRETED THEM AS "CLEAR INDICATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT

IS PREPARED" TO REPLACE SA POLICE WITH MILITARY FORCES.
ALTHOUGH BOTHA REFUSED TO COMMENT ON STAR ARTICLE, MARCH 14
AFRIKAANS PRESS DENIED THAT GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED
SUBSTITUTE MILITARY FOR POLICE IN RHODESIA AND QUOTED

DEFENSE FORCE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, BRIGADIER
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CYRUS SMITH, AS STATING THAT PRESUMPTIONS MADE BY THE

STAR WERE INCORRECT.

3. DESPITE CONTROVERSY OVER INTERPRETATION OF BOTHA'S REPLY TO QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE, AFRIKAANS AND ENGLISH PRESS AGREE THAT BOTHA SAID TERRORISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA HAS INCREASED TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT IT HAD BECOME "A WAR OF LOW INTENSITY." ALTHOUGH ONLY POLICE ARE CURRENTLY STATIONED IN RHODESIA "TO HELP PROTECT RHODESIA AGAINST THE INFILTRATION OF TERRORISTS ON THEIR WAY TO SOUTH AFRICA..." BOTHA STATED THAT "IN UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE IT IS NOT ALWAYS EASY TO DECIDE WHEN POLICE ACTION MUST END AND MILITARY ACTION MUST BEGIN." HE ALSO REFERRED TO RECENT LEGISLATION UNDER WHICH SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL SERVICEMEN CAN VOLUNTEER TO EXTEND THEIR PERIOD OF SERVICE FROM 12 MONTHS TO 18 OR 24 MONTHS. IN ADDITION, HE REPEATED PRIME MINISTER VORSTER'S PLEDGE TO AID NEIGHBORS IF THEY REQUEST HELP IN FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISTS (PRETORIA 4097).

4. COMMENT: BOTHA'S OFF-THE-CUFF REMARKS MIGHT BE SEEN AGAINST HIS REPUTATION FOR INTEMPERATE STATEMENTS, SUCH AS HIS ALLEGATIONS LAST YEAR ABOUT COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS. THEREFORE, DENIALS IN AFRIKAANS PRESS THAT SAG HAD DECIDED TO INTRODUCE TROOPS, ACCORDING TO OGGENBLAT AN ACTION TANTAMOUNT TO "DECLARATION OF WAR," PROBABLY REFLECTS GOVERNMENT THINKING ON ISSUE. HOWEVER, AS PRETORIA NEWS POINTED OUT, "IN LIGHT OF THE DEATH OF FOUR SA POLICEMEN IN RHODESIA (PRETORIA 998 AND PREVIOUS), AND THE DETERIORATING MILITARY SITUATION IN MOZAMBIQUE...", BOTHA'S REMARKS ARE OBVIOUSLY SIGNIFICANT. MININTERIOR MKPDER, ANSWERING QUESTIONS AT PRESS CONFERENCE IN RHODESIA LAST AUGUST, REPORTEDLY UPSET FOMMIN MULLER BY COMMENTS WHICH SEEMED TO IMPLY AN OPEN-ENDED COMMITMENT OF ASSISTANCE TO RHODESIA (PRETORIA 3174) AND IT POSSIBLE THERE TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT WITHIN SAG ON THIS ISSUE. GROWING SERIOUSNESS OF SECURITY SITUATION IN RHODESIA COULD EVENTUALLY LEAVE SOUTH AFRICA WITH UNPALATABLE ALTERNATIVES OF EITHER SEEING POSSIBLE END OF WHITE CONTROL OF RHODESIA OR FACING INTERNATIONAL HOSTILITY ON UNPRECEDENTED SCALE WHICH WOULD ACCOMPANY INTRODUCTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN TROOPS THERE.

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